

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9045

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, IS, US

SUBJECT: LANDAU ON THE SAUNDERS TESTIMONY

1. NOV. 19 JERUSALEM POST CARRIES FRONT PAGE ARTICLE BY DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT DAVID LANDAU CONCERNING CHANGE IN GOI ASSESSMENT OF SAUNDERS TESTIMONY BEFORE HIRC. RELEVANT EXCERPTS FOLLOW:

2. BEGIN TEXT: THE "SAUNDERS PAPER" IS NOT A REAL DEPARTURE FROM LONG-ESTABLISHED U.S. POLICY, ACCORDING TO HIGH-LEVEL SOURCES IN JERUSALEM. WASHINGTON HAS BEEN SAYING FOR SOME TIME, THE SOURCES SAID, THAT IT WOULD FAVOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION IF AND WHEN THAT TERRORIST MOVEMENT RECOGNIZES ISRAEL AND ACCEPTS UN RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338...

3. ISRAEL'S POSITION REMAINS: "NO TALKS WITH THE PLO WITHOUT QUALIFICATIONS," THE SOURCES SAY. THEY REFUSE TO FORMULATE A POSITION ON THE "HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION" OF WHETHER ISRAEL WOULD TALK WITH THE PLO IF IT RECOGNIZED ISRAEL AND ACCEPTED THE RESOLUTIONS.

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4. PLAINLY, THEY CONCEDE, THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL BODY OF OPINION WITHIN THE CABINET AND WITHIN THE LABOR-MAPAM ALIGNMENT WHICH FAVORS A POLICY POSITION STATING POSTIVELY THAT ISRAEL WOULD TALK WITH THE PLO UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.

5. BUT PREMIER RABIN, THE SOURCES SAY, BELIEVES IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO EMBARK ON A FUNDAMENTAL DEBATE ON THIS QUESTION AT THIS TIME. WITH SYRIA APPARENTLY UNINTERESTED IN GOLAN TALKS AT THE PRESENT, THE ARABS FIND IT CONVENIENT TO ACCENTUATE THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE--AND THERE IS NO NEED FOR ISRAEL TO PLAY ALONG WITH THEIR TACTIC, THE SOURCES ASSERT.

6. THEY SAY THE REACTION BY SOME ISRAEL NEWSPAPERS TO THE SAUNDERS PAPER WAS "HYSTERICAL." THE WISEST COURSE FOR ISRAEL WOULD BE TO ALLOW THE EPISODE TO SUBSIDE. THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION ITSELF HAS NO DESIRE TO DWELL ON THE SUBJECT AT THIS TIME, THEY ADD. THE TIMING OF SAUNDERS' EVIDENCE WAS "UNFORTUNATE"--BUT IT WAS NOT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S CHOOSING, HAVING BEEN DICTATED BY THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE'S TIMETABLE.

7. THESE SOURCES DO NOT EXPLAIN, HOWEVER, WHY--IF THE POLICY IS TO LET THE ISSUE SUBSIDE--THE CABINET ISSUED SUCH A SHARP STATEMENT ON SUNDAY IN REACTION TO THE SAUNDERS PAPER. THE STATEMENT ALLEGED THAT THE PAPER WAS REplete WITH "FACTUAL AND POLITICAL ERRORS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS," AND EXPRESSED "ALL THE MINISTERS' GRAVE RESERVATIONS."

8. SOME OBSERVERS FELT THE ANSWER LAY IN POLITICAL PRESSURES, BOTH FROM WITHOUT AND FROM WITHIN THE CABINET ITSELF, WHICH THE PREMIER FELT THE NEED TO ASSUAGE. END QUOTE.

9. IN RELATED COVERAGE, HATZOFI (NRP) ALSO NOTES GOI TURNABOUT AND AL HAMISHMAR REPORTS ON DINITZ-SISCO DISCUSSION; MAARIV AND JERUSALEM POST EDITORIALS ARE CRITICAL OF GOI FOR CONFUSING ISRAELI PUBLIC BY SUCH RAPID CHANGE OF ITS ASSESSMENT.
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